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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

4 August 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 260

SUBJECT: The Situation in Egypt Subsequent to the Army Coup

1. The dust raised by the Army coup d'etat in Egypt has not yet settled, and an estimate of future developments must await the clarification of certain essential points: (a) Nagib's intentions; (b) the cohesiveness of the Army Junta; (c) the influence of extremist groups upon the Junta; (d) the position of the Wafd Party; (e) Ali Maher's role; and (f) the attitude of the Army Junta toward the West.

2. Though the Army Junta has publicized its intention to confine itself to the reorganization of the Army and to leave political affairs to civilians, no steps have as yet been taken to yield power. A military dictatorship remains a distinct possibility, and it is rumored that when reforms within the Army are completed steps will be taken to establish it.

3. The Army group which staged the coup is held together by resentment of the former military command and disgust at corruption in politics and in the Court. Clearly, however, there are divergent elements within General Nagib's Junta. The Junta's ability to act as a cohesive force is now being tested by the necessity for making major policy decisions.

4. The possibility remains that General Nagib is only a figurehead for extremist groups in the Army, among which rumor includes the fanatical Moslem Brotherhood and the outlawed Communist Party. It is generally agreed that the Moslem Brotherhood has greatly increased its influence in the Army during the past few months, particularly among the younger officers. Army spokesmen, however, have recently denounced both the Brotherhood and Communism and have denied that either group influenced the coup.

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5. The powerful Wafd Party, which lost political power as a result of the 26 January riots, seems to be making little progress in its efforts to capitalize on the present situation. Nahas Pasha, former Wafd Prime Minister, and Serageddin, his Minister of Interior, rushed back to Egypt from Europe and immediately attempted to jump on the Army Junta bandwagon. However, there has been no concrete evidence that either the Army or the Prime Minister is being influenced by Wafdist overtures. On the contrary, Ali Maher and Najib's decision to proclaim a Provisional Regency Council which does not have to be approved by the Wafd-dominated Parliament, represents a severe set-back for the Wafd Party. An Army spokesman recently stated that the military are worried about the Wafd; they want to keep them from power but are unable to reconcile this with the Army group's role as "guardian of the constitution", as the Wafd is the only large political party in Egypt and is bound to win a free election.

6. Although the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Army Junta is not clear, it seems certain that Ali Maher's actions are subject to Army approval. He was forced to adhere to the Army's request for the abolition of the titles of pasha and bey, and to the appointment of a relatively unknown military man to a Cabinet post and to the Regency Council. Ali Maher's concern for constitutionality, his contemplated agrarian social reform program, his avowed intention to combat Communism, and his willingness to resume talks with the British on the Sudan make him appear to be one of the few remaining stabilizing influences in Egypt. His opposition to the return to power of Wafd nationalist extremists is indicated by his declared intention to postpone the holding of elections for six months and to form a political party to contest the elections when they do take place. It is not clear whether he will be willing to remain in office if the Army group continues to delay handing over full political powers.

7. Army spokesmen since the coup have manifested an attitude favorable to the West and have indicated an interest in receiving Western military aid and in participating in the Middle East Defense Organization.

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What kind of approach the Army will make to the Suez and the Sudan issues is not yet apparent.

- 2 -

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8. US and UK representatives in Egypt, while recognizing that the situation produced by the Army coup is fraught with dangers, feel that there are hopeful possibilities so long as order is maintained and the Army continues its policy of moderate reform.

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The material for this memorandum was prepared by [REDACTED], 25X1A9a